

THE AMERICAN NATIONAL PREACHER.

No. 1, Vol. XXII.

JANUARY, 1848.

Whole No. 253.

SERMON CCCCLXVI.

BY REV. ERSKINE MASON, D. D.,

Pastor of the Bleecker Street Presbyterian Church, New York.

NEW YEAR'S SERMON FOR 1848.

DEPENDENCE ON THE FUTURE.

"To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant."—ISAIAH 56 : 12, *last clause.*

If we have ever occupied some elevated and commanding position, we must have observed, that the scenery, at a great remove from us, far surpassed in beauty that which was directly under the eye. The spot we descried far off in the mighty distance, was of all others the most interesting; and we have sometimes thought that could we but reach that spot, we might settle down with perfect content, because there we should find none of those anxieties and discomforts which mar almost every scene in which we mingle.

We are all aware that there is deception here, and we explain it upon this simple principle, that in the distant perspective we really perceive only an outline, which our imagination fills up and colors. I allude to this, as an experience with which perhaps we are all perfectly familiar, and the explanation of which as thus given, we are ready to admit. Now, I do not lay an interdict upon this play of human fancy, or say, that it is wrong ever to allow the mind to follow it and to be amused with its beautiful delineations. I would not condemn the indulgence of imagination, any more than the exercise of memory or of judgment; a day-dream may be very pleasant, and the most fanciful reveries can never harm us, if they do not affect us improperly towards sober realities. But, should the tendency of such fancy pictures, and such visionary enchantments be to disgust us with the objects around us, and make us dissatisfied with the circumstances amid which Providence has called us to move, should they indispose us toward the duties of our present station, or lead us lightly to

estimate, if not utterly to neglect the advantages which belong to it, then imagination becomes the master, instead of the servant of judgment, and the sooner its spell is broken and its enchantment dissolved, the better for our interest as well as our enjoyment. How idle, how ruinous is it to everything like peace of mind, to be perpetually sighing after the fancied beauties of some distant, and perhaps inaccessible habitation, and thus to become indifferent to the realities and dissatisfied with the comforts of one's actual home.

It must be evident to every one, that what is thus true of space, is equally true of time. The coloring which fancy throws over the distant scenery of nature is no more beautiful, nor captivating than that which hope throws over the perspective of the future. How apt we are to live amid coming scenes. How constantly do we find ourselves forming our calculations, and laying out our plans for futurity, and rejoicing, by anticipation, in pleasures we have yet to reach—thus are we perpetually framing, and peopling with images of our own creation the worlds in which we expect to dwell. "To-morrow," we think, "shall be better than to-day." The scenes before us are brighter than any which are past, or present—the results yet to be evolved, grander and richer, than any which have been developed; the enjoyment expected more intense and permanent, than any we have hitherto experienced. Thus we make up the deficiencies of the present, by the anticipations of the future; our enjoyment to-day is owing to the vision of to-morrow, our happiness is the creature of our expectations, and hope gives us fortitude for endurance, and energy for action.

Now you do not understand me as finding fault with this peculiarity of our nature, a peculiarity belonging to us, as we came from the hand of our Creator, or as denouncing the impropriety and wickedness of forming plans for the future. We might as well try to put an arrest upon the movement of the natural world, as to prevent man from looking forward; we cannot help it, and if we could, religion forbids the indulgence of an improvident spirit.

And yet, there is a distinction to be maintained, between the right exercise and the perversion of any faculty of the human mind. There is nothing wrong in the simple exercise of hope—nothing foolish or criminal in the anticipations of the future. But when our expectations, as immortal creatures, are altogether earthly, when they are connected with irrational, because unfounded, confidences, when our calculations for the future lead us to overlook or underrate privileges or advantages actually in possession; when they lead us to neglect the duties of to-day under the impression that they may much more easily, and in a better manner be performed to-morrow; when, in short, hope becomes the

parent of procrastination, then are we living under an influence which controls us only by means of its deceptions, and which must be disastrous, as it can end only in disappointments, painful and bitter, as our calculations have been confident, and our hopes sanguine.

The state of mind I have thus set before you is the one to which the words of my text give expression, and one against which the whole strain of inspired teaching is directed. The Word of God comes home to us, rebuking these strong confidences and inordinate hopes for the future, by telling us that they are wholly unfounded, since we do not know whether the developments of that future will honor one of our confidences, meet one of our calculations, or answer one of our hopes. This is the argument of inspiration, and yet of all arguments, it is perhaps the most difficult to commend to the human mind. Who of us does not find it almost impossible to entertain the thought which it involves? Who of us can bring himself to think, that his wisest and best digested plans may come to naught, his strongest confidence prove to be utterly worthless, and his longest cherished and most sanguine hopes be entirely blasted? And yet this is the sentiment which the Bible would have us to understand and incorporate among our elements of thought and feeling; and it strikes us that we can never ponder it so well as upon an occasion like the present. We occupy to-day* a position which commands the past, where our thoughts naturally run back over the scenes which have been enacted and the events which have transpired, and where we can gather up the lessons of the months which have fled, and as we study them, see how clearly they illustrate and impressively enforce the sentiment before us, as they throw the light of facts upon the vanity of most of our future confidences.

We would carry you then to-day in pursuit of our general object, amid some of the walks of ordinary life over which you have already travelled, and where yet we find you. We enter the scenes of earthly business, and we hear from many directions and from many lips the utterance of complaint, as we see many signs of dissatisfaction, if we are not compelled to listen to the sighs, and groans of a deep and bitter disappointment. But a short time since, in these same circles, and upon these same walks, everything was different. There were joyous faces and sanguine hopes. There was one, perhaps, who should have talked of our melancholy and misanthropic spirit, had we attempted to throw in a suggestion of doubt between his mind and the vision which entranced and captivated him. Borne high by hope upon the wave of prosperous experiment, he feared no mountain-billow which might overwhelm him, he dreaded no hidden rock upon which his proud bark might strike, and be dashed to pieces. But

* The first Sabbath of the year.

we come to him now and ask him how the event compares with his previous confidence? Where are his plans and enterprises, now—those wondrous plans which were certainly to evolve such happy results, and upon which his heart was set so strongly? Events wholly unlooked for, and aside from every one of his calculations, have changed the aspect of everything, to him. The foundation upon which he stood, perhaps has gone, he feels that his confidence has deceived him. Is there to be found in this world a human being who ever rightly anticipated the changes which have actually taken place in his own personal history? Is there one, let his powers of calculation, and skill in management be ever so great, the course of whose affairs has been in accordance with his preconceived views, his sanguine expectations, and his distinct and confident prophecies? The most sagacious statesman, the most wily politician, the man of clearest and far-reaching fore cast, has been utterly disappointed, no less than the man of the weakest intellect, and, I had almost said, of the most thoughtless improvidence. And what does it all mean? How are we to explain the unexpected changes which constantly take place, the disappointments which so often try and even break the human spirit? Are they mere fortuities, the results of accident or lawless chance, furnishing no salutary or impressive lesson for the human mind to study? This is entirely too atheistical. No! there is a God, who reigneth in the earth, and he has been moving unseen amid the elements around us, controlling and regulating all things. Not a sparrow falleth to the ground, nor a hair from our heads, without his notice, nor without design. And the movements which are constantly taking place, defeated plans, blasted hopes, withering, crushing disappointments, are but the rebukes which a God of Providence is administering to the spirit which so constantly controls us, as it whispers in our ear, "Tomorrow shall be as this day, and yet more abundant."

The world is full of illustrations of my general thought. The difficulty with us is not to discover them, but to make a selection from the mass which lies on every side around us. I do but tell you that with which you are already familiar, when I say with regard to every man, that his circumstances are scarcely in any one point of view, what a short time since, he confidently expected they should be. We have all of us been carried along sometimes unconsciously, but always really, by influences which never entered into any of our calculations, and have passed through changes, against which, as we did not foresee them, we could make no provision. It is not a morose and ascetic spirit, which has often represented human life as a collection of disappointments. Every one has, to a greater or less degree, found out from his own experience the truth of the representation. We often fail entirely even of pursuing the ends which we originally con-

templated, as we certainly do, of the points which we expected to reach. I start out for action with all my plans well laid, I advance a step or two, when a circumstance very trifling in itself changes all my determinations, and in a little while I am surprised to discover how totally different from my original intention, is my present course.

Thus a man finds himself in very different circumstances from those in which he expected to be; the place of his residence is not where he thought it should be. His character, perhaps, is the very opposite to that which he intended to form. He means to be honorable by emulating the course of one who had gone before him, and who had reached the highest point of earthly distinction; and yet, how it happens he cannot tell, he is astonished and broken-hearted as he sees others pass by him in the race, and seize upon the objects on which he had fixed his eye, and which he fondly hoped ere long to reach. He means to be rich, and plans accordingly, and yet he finds himself struggling onward with a bare subsistence, and perhaps not even securing that, while another, of far less sagacity in planning, and less energy in execution, whose prospects were not so flattering as his own, amasses the fortune which he expected to gather, and rides by him in all the pomp and pride of gilded splendor. Whatever may be his end or whatever his measures to reach it, he thinks the world is full of good and moves forward without suspicion and without fear; but he very soon finds that it is not always a friend who looks pleasantly upon him; that the smile of apparent approval is not an evidence of good will, and that professions may be falsified and promises broken as easily as made. To be dependent upon others is to be friendless; to need assistance is to be almost sure of its refusal. Oh! how different is all this from his wishes, his plans, his hopes! Thus are the darling schemes and fondest anticipations frustrated, as time rolls on and evolves events. Sagacity contrives, patience matures, industry laboriously executes, and disappointment smiles at the fabric which has been so curiously reared and so beautifully adorned, and at the moment its completion is expected, the stern hand of reality sweeps the whole away, or leaves only the ruins to tell of its former existence.

Scarcely different is the result in those cases where the issue of our course is in exact accordance with our previous plans. Success crowns our efforts, we reach the point we had in view, we seize the object at which we grasped, and yet we are creatures of disappointment. We thought that if we could attain a particular spot, or gain a particular object, or put ourselves in a particular position, we should need nothing more to fill up our cup of joy. We have amassed our gold, we have reached our eminence, we have secured our fame, we have built up our reputation, yet

neither wealth, nor position, nor fame, is what we expected to find it. We are depressed in the midst of our joy, disappointed in the midst of our success, we are as far removed from happiness as ever, and we sicken and pine in view of the proofs which our own experience is furnishing us of the vanity of human confidences.

I surely need not stop to defend the appositeness of these illustrations of my general thought, taken from our temporal circumstances, for I have been but detailing an experience with which, to a greater or less extent, all are perfectly acquainted. You feel not only the truth of what I have uttered, but the forcefulness also with which that truth demonstrates the emptiness of all earthly dependence; and perhaps not a day passes which does not heave into being something to contradict the lying spirit which tells us, "To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant."

We pass, then, from the natural to the spiritual world, and seek there also for illustrations. It is one of the common-places of human thought, that the scenes of the present have an intimate connexion with, and important bearing upon, those of a future world. We are passing onward through a day of probation, and through the events of time, to the hour of retribution and the realities of eternity. The fact here stated makes, generally speaking, but a feeble impression, and yet there are times when it takes a deep and strong hold upon the mind, and awakens the most painful emotions. No thought can be more dreadful than that of an eternity unprovided for. A sense of hopelessness, ascertained and utter, is so dreadful, so unnatural, so crushing, that not one of us could endure it unrelieved, a single hour. Oh! how a feeling of despair unhinges the mind, furrows the countenance, and gives wildness to the eye. Who in this world knows anything of despair, in reference to the world which is to come? And yet there are but few, if, indeed, any, who consider themselves in every respect prepared for an exchange of worlds. The most spiritually-minded and devoted Christian finds, upon an examination of his heart and circumstances, that there is something he wishes to do, some attainment he must make, some duty he must perform, before he can consider himself prepared for his last account, and he is often calculating with a good degree of confidence, upon making that attainment and discharging that duty before he shall hear his summons to the judgment-seat.

It is worse than this with the man out of the kingdom of God. What can be more terrible than a hopeless death? From what does the mind shrink more instinctively than the thought of putting one's head upon a dying pillow, without an interest in Jesus Christ, and sinking into one's last sleep without any comforting presage of the future? Unconverted men will bear me witness that they do

not expect to die as they are, and unchanged to enter upon a scene of eternal realities. Nothing is more distinct to their apprehension than their entire unfitness for such a wondrous transition, and an alteration in their character and position is embraced among the most confident of their hopes. They have more than once given promises to this effect to a wakeful and a remonstrating conscience, and have perhaps most distinctly, most deliberately, and I am sure most sincerely, formed their plans and matured their purposes. They intend to be Christians before they die. Now what does this mean? What disclosure does it make concerning their state, if it does not show them lying in the lap of the enchantress who borrows her witchery from the fascinations of the future, and charmed into composure by the soft notes which she sings, "To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant." Here is a vain expectation leading a man to overlook his present advantages, and neglect his present duties, and to decline doing that which he knows and feels ought to be done to-day, upon the strength of the deceitful presumption, that he may do it much more easily to-morrow.

Now, at this very point, I would have you to pause a moment and look back upon the past, and see if you cannot gather from its lessons a powerful rebuke of this prevalent spirit. I address the Christian, and ask him, in all kindness, if his condition in a spiritual point of view to-day is at all answerable to his previous hopes and calculations? Tell me, you who are in the kingdom of Jesus Christ, is there one of you who has discharged all the duties he meant to discharge, or has made all the attainments he intended to make? Are you the spiritually-minded disciple you expected to be upon this first Sabbath of the year? And yet we all formed our plans, as we thought, with a great deal of wisdom. It may be that we began their execution with some good promise of success, but some trifling circumstance, some slight but unexpected change in our earthly condition, our relations or our position, intervened, diverted our attention, and altered the whole current of our thoughts, and by subjecting us to new trains of influence, led us to other and different plans, and our purposes of spiritual improvement, if they have not been wholly forgotten, remain wholly unexecuted.

It is precisely so with unconverted men. They can remember the searching exhibitions of Divine truth which poured light in upon their minds, and the touching, and tender, and powerful appeal of the gospel which awakened strong emotions in their bosoms. They can remember, perhaps, hours of deep distress, when their spirits were bowed down and almost crushed by the dispensations of Providence, as those whom they most loved were taken away from them, or as God had to do with their conscience;

and they felt the fearfulness and painfulness of sin. There were purposes, then, intelligent and solemn, of repentance and obedience to Christ, and they have not been "few and far between." They mark, at very short intervals, the path upon which men travel, and present themselves now in such numbers to the memory, that they can hardly enumerate them. Go back then, if you please, to some foregone moment of your existence, some of those impressive scenes, or some of those hours of thoughtfulness to which we have alluded, and endeavor to call up, as distinctly as you can, the exercises which then belonged to you, and as your memory traces them with a faithful pencil, bear with this simple question, Did you expect that this first Sabbath of the year should have found you out of the kingdom of God, without a hope for the eternal world, and with so little interest upon the subject of the great salvation, and so utterly unmoved by your dreadful neglect of it? And has the past no lesson for *you* to learn? Does it throw no light upon the developments of the future? As you see how its confidences have deluded, and its promises deceived you, and betrayed your too pliant and trustful spirit into the hands of him who would destroy you, you need no argument from me or from any one else, to show you the folly of trusting to the morrow; or if you do, you can have it, as the picture of the past is thus held up to your view, and its powerful appeal against false trusts, tells upon your spirit. No! no! you need no other argument than this. So far as religion is concerned, you are to-day a disappointed man, and your present condition is as diverse from all your plans and calculations as it could have been, had you aimed at results directly the opposite of those your intentions contemplated.

This, however, is not the only light in which human disappointments must be studied; there is another, more solemn and more painful. All our calculations for the future proceed upon the presumption of future life. We expect to live, and so, at least, to have time to carry our purposes into execution. And yet I take it upon myself to say, that amid all our calculations not one can be found so rash as this. I feel when I utter this sentence, involving, as it does, the thought of the uncertainty of human life, that I am addressing myself to (of all others) the most difficult service I am called to perform. The subject is in its own nature so trite, its illustrations are so common-place, because it has been made a theme of such incessant declamation; it is, moreover, in every view of it, so familiar, and withal so distasteful, that we feel oppressed when we speak of it, and would resign our duty, if we dared, into other hands.

But we cannot do so—an obligation rests upon us, and however painful, we must discharge it. Constrained then by a sense of duty, though we must repeat what has been a thousand times

said upon a subject which for ages has had no novelty about it, we must speak, relying simply upon this confidence, that he who has "ordained by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe," can carry home the best known truths to the conscience in such a manner as to render them more effectual than those upon which we most rely, as seeming to give us the best promise of success.

We were speaking of the vanity of confidences for the future in view of the uncertainty of human life ; and we would have you turn over only a few leaves in the volume of history, and read their contents. Of those who began life with you, how many, think you are remaining ? See, I beseech you, how the ranks of your early associates have constantly thinned out. Your hearts, it may be, have bled, as one and another, and a third have been cut down by your side, of those in whose society you delighted, and with whom you took counsel as to your earthly plans and interests, or shared your earthly joys. And yet their confidence in life was as strong as is yours now ; their plans were as well laid, their hopes as sanguine, their prospects as bright, as are yours now ; and while, as it is now with you, the future stretched itself out before them, filled with scenes, and peopled with the images which an ardent fancy had called into being, and they were hastening with eager impetuosity to seize upon the bright objects which dazzled their vision, some sudden stroke laid them low, and terminated their earthly course and their earthly hopes together.

Or go into the silent and solemn graveyard, and as you tread, on every side, upon new-made graves, upon which as yet perhaps not a blade of grass has grown, ask yourselves how many of those who are sleeping there in the stillness of the sepulchre, expected that this day should find them the prey of worms, and the victims of corruption ?

Amid that throng, which, only during the past year, has gone down to people the mansions of the dead, there was a young man, a mother's pride and a father's hope. His youthful mind had been early imbued with religious truth, and that truth had been so fastened upon his conscience by parental instruction and parental prayer, that he could not disengage himself from its influence ; and he had his plans and purposes of repentance, but "tomorrow" sounded very sweetly, and charmed him into forgetfulness of them, while he had yet one thing to accomplish—one earthly plan to execute, one transient joy in which to participate, and with which he thought religion would interfere ; and there he lies beneath the clods of the valley, while his spirit has gone with its unfinished plans and unfulfilled purposes, to the God who gave it. And there is an epitaph which records the name and age of some child of fashion, who forgot her God, amid the frivo-

lities of earth, who was too much engaged with the vanities and idolatries of the world to think of that Savior whose voice she could not but hear, and whose love she could not but feel to have been great.

And there is another, the man of business, cut down in the prime of life, hurried away from scenes of enterprise and action, from those unfinished undertakings which engrossed his soul, and which he thought he might safely complete, before he gave his attention to eternal things; and there is yet another, the man of three-score years and ten, who had oft "resolved and re-resolved yet died the same." The bridal wreath has been exchanged for the winding-sheet, the hue of health for the pallid aspect of death, the hurry and excitement of worldly business and pleasure, for the stillness and repose of the tomb. There are no circumstances in which we can be placed, where a voice from the past does not reach us; not a confidence, however strong, in reference to which a voice of warning does not come to us from some new-made grave, to caution us against the folly of trusting to to-morrow.

Of how many disappointments, during the last year, think you, does God's book of remembrance keep the record?—and disappointments, too, deep, bitter, fearful, because eternal;—disappointments, compared with which life's heaviest trials are lighter than vanity—the disappointments of human spirits who expected much and have been reft of everything, who have failed of the great salvation, which they never intended permanently to neglect, who meant to rise and live in heaven, but who sank, and made their bed in hell.

And Oh! how many of you are treading in their footsteps to reach a like disappointment. I know you could not feel as you do, and act as you do, but for your strong confidence in to-morrow. I admit, there is wonderful power in temptation. I admit, there is great fascination in the things of time and sense; and the tendency of earthly objects is to engross the soul. But then there is a greater power in the things of the world which is to come. There is a mightier fascination about the brightening glories and flashing fires of eternity. There is that in the verities of the gospel which can take a stronger hold upon the mind, if they were but looked at. And every man may break the power of this world, and bring himself under the mightier influence of eternal realities, if he would but possess himself of this conviction:—These realities are just before me. Yes! this is the secret of men's carnality, and neglect of the gospel—"To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant."

If we could certify to our hearers that they had but a month, or a year to live, they could not devote this month, or this year, or any part of them, to pursuits which would shame them at the judgment-seat of Christ. You should not, any of you, be inat-

tentive to the exhortation of to-day—you should not continue indifferent to the subject of religion, and trusting to to-morrow, if we were gifted with a spirit of prophecy, and could show to each individual the exact time he had to live, if we could show to all, that men should tread upon their sleeping dust, before the earth should have performed another revolution. We cannot do this, but we can say to some, The close of this year shall find your bodies in the cold damp sepulchre. Can you believe it, and yet be unconcerned about the eternal world? But because you know we cannot compute the moment, the hour, and the day of your death—because we can only tell you that life is short, and you can be here for a few days, perhaps—you can venture to live as though you should be here for ever. No, we cannot point out the day, the month, the year, when you shall close your earthly course, we have no revelation on this point from on high—and, I may add, we need none, to assure us that some will die during this year upon which we have entered, we know this without any inspiration from above; we *know* that some who are living to-day will be in the sepulchre when this anniversary returns; and we very much fear that some of you may illustrate the truth of God's word, "The wicked is driven away in his wickedness." Oh! what words are those to describe the mode of a sinner's departure into the eternal world! It may be so with you, I warn you of it, *you* may be "driven away in your wickedness." If you are not Christians, no mortal eye may see your struggle, and no mortal tongue may be able to tell of the violent instrumentality necessary to dislodge you from this world. There may be no outward painful manifestations, but there may be an invisible wrestling—and a dreadful inward struggle, like that of one who feels an iron grasp upon him—We do not know who or when it shall be—God be thanked that we do not. We cannot tell when any one of us shall step upon another scene. We know only that any of us may soon do so, at any time, and anywhere. Where is the dread threshold of the court of our eternal judge?—Anywhere! everywhere! Some of us will cross it this year. That point will not be questioned by any who put confidence in the revelations which the experience of the past furnishes—and if it is so—if it is certain that some of you must die this year—you will not, you cannot, be guilty of the madness of throwing upon the future the work of your repentance—while God calls upon you to make your calling and election sure, you will not answer "To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant." To-morrow! that voice may not be heard. To-morrow! see those poisoning scales in which your destinies are placed, and that hand just ready to strike the balance. See that opening grave—it has been dug for you—and on that spot, where shortly you shall lie, stands the long suffer-

ing Son of God, holding back the destroying angel, while he pleads *with* you and *for* you—you cannot be deaf to his entreaty “Come, sinner, haste, O! haste away, while yet a pardoning God is found.” And while you listen, there is another voice, how solemn its message, how startling its tones! It is the voice of one who moves amid the tombs—and as he points to the graves, where lie the wrecks of once manly forms, the decaying tenements of once promising and procrastinating, but now ruined spirits, he says, “Thus will I do unto thee, and because I will thus do unto thee, prepare to meet thy God.” Listen to it, ye young, ye middle aged, and ye old—listen to it—for ye are yet here. The summons has not yet gone forth for any of us—the stroke is not yet descending—the weaver’s shuttle is yet playing—the eagle has not yet descended upon his prey—ye are in a world of hope—God waits to be gracious. Oh! ye who have been approached solemnly—who have been warned faithfully—who have waited long—ye who have met every argument, every entreaty, every appeal, with this same reply, “to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant”—see the great destroyer coming with your names written in his commission—and while you tremble at the summons he is about to utter, betake yourselves quickly to your closets, and there pour out your prayer, “So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”

SERMON CCCCLXVII.

BY REV. GEORGE SHEPARD,

Professor in the Theological Seminary, Bangor, Maine.

THE END AT HAND.

But the end of all things is at hand; be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.—1 PETER, iv : 7.

THE same Apostle says in another connexion, “The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night.” There are announcements very similar to the above, scattered throughout the New Testament. Paul, writing to the Philippians, exhorts, “Let your moderation be known to all men : the Lord is at hand.” Writing to Christians at Rome, he says : “The night is far spent ; the

day is at hand." James, in his epistle, says, "Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh;" in the next verse, he says, "The Judge standeth before the door." In the Revelation it is written, "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely, I come quickly. Even so, come Lord Jesus."

The question here arises, are these declarations true in the sense which the writers entertained when they penned them? Or, are we to suppose that they were permitted to cherish the error—an innocent one, some may think, that the coming of Christ to judgment was literally at hand? Let it be observed, that Paul occasionally uses language of the above import. "The Lord is at hand." These things are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." He seems to speak of the Resurrection as an event to occur in his own time. "The Lord shall descend, the trump shall sound; the dead in Christ shall rise first; and then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air." This, and other language of the Apostle, appears to have been interpreted and understood by many to declare the speedy coming of the Lord; so that in another epistle, the Apostle charges them, "that they be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ (meaning the great final day) is at hand." Then he goes on to say that it is not immediately to occur, there being some great events to precede it. From this it appears, that Paul certainly, and probably the other apostles, were not cherishing the belief, that the day of Judgment was literally near. These declarations—"The coming of the Lord draweth nigh;" "The Judge standeth before the door;" "Behold, I come quickly;" "The end of all things is at hand;"—these and similar declarations were made nearly two thousand years ago, and things have remained as they were; there has been no Resurrection, no day of Judgment. At the same time, those declarations were intelligently made; they *were* and *are* true.

In what sense, then, were they and are they true? It is manifest they had a meaning, and if they had, they still have a meaning, which is consistent with what, two thousand years ago, was the fact, and is still the common doctrine, that the great day of Judgment is not absolutely and literally near at hand.

The language, obviously, has a reference to, and an accomplishment in, successive, and somewhat differing events. The Lord is represented as coming in the overthrow of the Jewish state and polity. This was the winding up of the first great dispensation; the first grand period of the Church; indeed, the first grand period of time. This came to its end by one of the most awful judgments God ever visited on any people. By some it is supposed, that Peter, in his remarkable declaration—"The end

of all things is at hand," had reference primarily, to that appalling catastrophe and consummation. It is certain that Christ warned his disciples of this, his first coming for purposes of retribution. He gave them definite signs of his coming; and described that coming in language similar to that which is used to invest with majesty and terror his final advent. This consummation and overthrow was then literally at hand. It was an event of absorbing, yea, agonizing interest to every Jewish heart; and one which called for utmost vigilance and prayer.

Admitting this interpretation, the passage is not lost, in its palpable bearing upon us. The winding up of the first grand period of the world was manifestly and strongly typical of the far more sublime and awful winding up of the second. The first has passed: the end of the second is to come; it is coming; it is nearing. This is the literal meaning of the word translated *at hand*. The end of all things is nearing. The completion of the first is proof of the coming and the certainty of the second. The first coming of Christ, for retribution, in the manner he did, in exact accordance with his own uttered and recorded prediction, is proof that he will come a second time, at the end of the world, in the sublime and glorious manner described in the sacred record. Let any person of seriousness and candor, read the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew, and compare it with the chapter in Josephus, in which that historian, an enemy to the Christian faith, describes the exact and literal accomplishment of our Savior's words, in which he foretold the events of his first coming: then let him read the twenty-fifth chapter, in which the same Lord Jesus foretells and describes his second coming for the purpose of final retribution of quick and dead, and it would seem he cannot resist the conviction, that his second and final coming will take place just as it is predicted, and the history and results of it will be written in the perfected redemption of the saved, and uttered and echoed in the deeper wailings of the lost.

The language, then, has an important meaning, a stirring significance, as referring to the Lord's coming to judgment. As a great event, transcending and overshadowing all others; to the fixed gaze of faith, as it were, obliterating all others; ever coming, rapidly nearing, striding, even rushing on, it may be said to be at hand. Certainly, it appears so, to the mind so absorbed in the amazing contemplation as to forget, at the time, all other things. It is really so, in strict truth, when the line between this and the judgment-day is set off against the line which measures the eternity beyond. It is but a step—a point even, to the time when the trump shall sound, the judge appear, the tenants of the grave come forth, and pass the dread ordeal.

But to this great, this final ending, there are other subordinate endings. Death is the end of the world to him who dies; the

same to him as if all sublunary things were literally abolished. The glorious sun, the broad blue sky, the green earth, and the flowing streams, henceforth are nought to him; he will know them no more for ever. With him, it is all ended; the most pregnant and momentous stage of his existence; that, on which the whole subsequent eternity depends, is ended. He has gone to his final account; gone to his eternal home. Amazing consummation to the spirit that departs. And how fast are spirits departing. Nearly thirty millions of these consummations occur every year; about eighty thousand occur every day; more than three thousand every hour. Almost every swing of the pendulum crowds a soul into eternity. In this way a whole race is soon gone. The world may remain as it is a hundred years from this; the sun, moon, and stars will shine with unabated brightness and beauty, but other eyes will see them; the eyes they now enlighten, the bodies they now warm and cheer, will abide in the darkness and corruption of the grave. To all now on the stage it will be ended; a whole race ended; we, as a part of it ended. May we not say then, and feel it as we say, The end is at hand. How quickly will it be upon you, and upon me, as an individual; this rushing flight of time, these thronging diseases ready to prey upon us, these shafts of the destroyer flying all about us, these wasting sands, this ebbing pulse, this tottering frailty, all say in the reflecting ear—mortal, to you the end of all things is near,—the termination of all earthly hopes and schemes, and pleasures is near—the closing of all these changes, and the entering upon the stabilities of an eternal condition, is near; and not only near, but every day it is coming nearer; death is nearing; judgment nearing; eternity nearing; every step in life is a step towards the sepulchre; the next may be a step into it. This inflexible uncertainty adhering to our condition, gives, if possible, still greater force to the announcement of the text—near, nearing, but how near none can tell. To-day you may be well; to-night you may be contending with nature's great agony; to-morrow you may be dressed for your coffin. When I look at these facts, when I consider this life, how sure and how momentous its end; all worldly things, to the departing, ending with it; when I see how quickly a generation passes, as it were, crowded off by a new one rising up to take its place, this again to be crowded off and disappear as soon; one going, another coming, and all bringing on the great consummation; this final end, nearing, ever nearing, with the lightning-like speed of time, I do feel that there is a meaning, and a truth, and an amazing solemnity to the inspired declaration: the end of all things is at hand.

My next remark upon this passage, is: there being a meaning in it to us, it presents a motive for us; it is a great and permanent motive. This consideration of the end at hand, has moved

thousands and myriads who were on the stage many centuries ago. Emphatically was it one of the great moving considerations of the early Christians. These two: first the cross, then the coming. They thought a great deal of Christ's coming, and the end; their sustained fervor and engagedness were owing, in part, to their vivid apprehensions of the great winding scene. Their spirits were kindled and exalted by their visions of that coming glory and majesty. Could we look into the experience of those of every period, who have been eminently active and holy, and see the hidden springs of their piety, we should find, that like Baxter, they had been persons greatly affected by an approaching death and judgment.

The next point is, How is this motive to become influential, effective, in any measure proportioned to its greatness and solemnity? How has it been in the case of others? How is it to be in our case? Not, let me say distinctly, by believing in actual, literal nearness, or vicinage. There are some who seem to think, that the great event is nothing, comparatively, as motive, if at a distance. If the judgment be a century ahead, it is of little consequence how we demean ourselves. We are to wake up and bestir ourselves, because, and only because, the scene is actually right upon us. I admit we should bestir ourselves, did we know death or judgment to be literally at our door; but not *only* for this supposed nearness. It is the very spirit and essence of brutish unbelief, to be affected only by a present, palpable event of this sort. There is no faith about it; we know there is a great deal of praying when death has come to summon the spirit away, but what is praying in sickness and death good for, if there were none in life and health? What is praying in a storm good for; what avails it, if there were none in fair weather? So in the final day; there will unquestionably be a great deal of praying when the graves are opening and the dead are rising, and the world is burning; but what will it avail? An event or motive of this sort made palpable, and brought right upon one with infinite and visible pressure, is enough to make a demon pray; and he would be a demon when he had done. But all the power of an event or scene which is to affect him, in the case of the considerate man, does not lie in the contact of that scene. It is, indeed, a solemn thing to die; it is also a solemn thing to live and look forward to the hour. It is a solemn thing to be laying by material for the judgment, as well as to be actually judged—to be treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, as well as to encounter its actual and dreadful infliction. On many accounts it would be better for me, that death strike me to-day, than that he delay the stroke a quarter of a century, and I pass and close that period in unrepented sin: better for me, that the arch-angel's trump summon me this hour before the great white throne, than that the

time be delayed for me to make longer my line and blacker my account of guilt. O! that men felt more the solemnity of living; there is motive in living, as well as in dying.

But to recur to that great event—THE END; if not by believing in literal nearness, how is it to be made effectual as motive; I answer, as has already been intimated, by the eye of faith looking directly upon it. In this way, it is brought near; it seems near, but a step, indeed, to death and the judgment. Faith fixes upon the *certainty* of the event, whatever else may fail, this will come. Death, judgment, eternity, are assuredly before me.

Faith considers the *uncertainty* of the time. None can divine the time. Men have tried to pry it up from the depths of an unrevealed secrecy—have made their confident calculations, some in this way, others in that; evolving, as they have thought, the hitherto baffling intricacies of prophecy; and so the world has been told again, and again and again, when the trump shall sound, and the judgment be set; but the event has always proved, and doubtless always will, that of that day and that hour, knoweth no man. Faith looks upon it as a sudden, surprising event; which, when it does come, will come not by arithmetical computation, but as a thief in the night.

Faith fixes upon the grandeur and solemnity of the event, and its accompaniments. They will soon be here, and they will indeed be amazing—an amazing scene when the Son of Man shall appear in his glory, and ten thousand times ten thousand angels shall be round about him; and the damned coming up in chains from the pit; and all the dead coming forth from the opening graves; and all the living in a moment changed; the heavens rolling together like a scroll; earth and sea and the elements melting and burning; all nations together ascending to stand before the Son of Man; a part on the right hand, the remainder on the left; the former to hear—Come, blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom: the latter to hear—Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire; and the blessed go through the gates into the golden city; and the doomed go down into the devouring flame, to be for ever with the devil and his angels. Truly, it will be a day of greatness and wonders, equal to all other days gathered into one. As faith fastens upon it, meditates, dwells, gazes thereon, the scene keeps nearing, and swelling out into greatermagnitude; and while thus absorbed and admiring, the believing soul greatly longs for that advent and that glory, and so hastens unto the coming of the day of God—by the strength of hope and desire, as it were, leaping forth to meet it; all these, the faith, the fixedness, the desire, the grandeur of the scene, its rapid nearing, its certainty as to fact, its uncertainty as to time, destined to burst forth upon an astonished world; these things, when realized, make out, we think, a strong case—an unequalled pressure of motive.

And here, let me say, is where every man ought to live, with the end before him; death, judgment, eternity, the impending realities of his vision, often painting their mighty image upon the very retina of his soul. So living, how will he live? How will he be affected?

One thing is, his estimate of the present world will be exceedingly reduced and sobered. This estimate, as a general thing, is exorbitant, overgrown. Most think far too highly of the world. It glares upon men, bewilders them, and bewitches them. The difficulty is, it is not viewed enough as Paul viewed, when he said, "The fashion of this world passeth away." Let but this simple fact—it passes, the end at hand—be incorporated among the living, productive sentiments of the heart, and everything about it, every feeling toward it, and every action for it, will be changed. There will be a wonderful coming down and sobering of the whole view and feeling and pursuit. The man has simply come to understand the tenure. This is not my home; nothing here can be long retained. I am not to place my supreme regard upon this sin-deformed, this death-struck scene. I am not going to act the fool before the universe, in scrambling for the baubles of a moment, to the neglect and perdition of my undying spirit. I am not going to barter away the wealth of my immortality for the poor indulgence, the sorry debasement of an hour: Thus he loosens his selfish, his maddened grasp upon the world. The view we have taken, goes to moderate all our earthly passions and griefs. Brethren, the time is short; it remaineth, that they that weep be as though they wept not, and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy as though they bought not; and they that use this world, as though they used it not. Every earthly good will have receded; every earthly convenience have been abandoned, and every affliction forgotten in the oblivion of the grave.

The habit of dwelling beneath these impending scenes, cannot fail to quicken the spiritual affections, and give new strength and intensity to the Christian's zeal. What a prize there is for him to win! what an inheritance! what a glory! In his near, full view of it, it seems wonderful, it staggers, it all but overpowers him. And yet he pants unutterably for that purity and glory. The soul, too, with its vast capacities, redemption, with its interminable results, appear to him in a new light, and call upon him with a new urgency. How many are the exposed; they are all about us; they are on the edge of the precipice; they are pouring into the dark abyss; thousands, and millions, to be saved soon, if saved ever. Christ, who died for them, and whose love you have felt, appeals to you, appeals to me: Go, carry my gospel; tell them of, and urge them to the place of refuge—the covert from the gathering tempest!

The Christian, whose eyes are open to these things—to that heaven, that hell, that Savior, that Judge, that Judgment—all near, fast hastening on, if there be any life in him, will be moved to do something for his Lord. He will not, he cannot sleep, any more than he will be able literally to sleep, when all the dead are stirring in their graves. He will wake, and work, and he will pray God to bless his labor in the Lord.

Christian hearer, try and bring these matters home to your own heart, your own case. In a little, you pass away and are here no more. Are you ready? Is your work done?—done in your own soul? done in the field around you? so that the Lord will say to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Most blessed approval at such an hour, before such a presence. Most dreadful and crushing will be the reverse: some will hear, "Thou wicked and slothful servant." So live and labor, watch and pray, in the season of effort and prayer, that the welcome, and not the woe, shall be yours; then shall you be for ever with the Lord.

Unconverted hearer, you are not prepared; and yet you may be on the the brink of ruin. Have you thought of your situation, and of the scene you are to meet? Consider them now, wait not for a literal contact; wait not for the agitation and decay of a death-bed; wait not for the trump of judgment to stir your conscience and move your sensibilities. Ponder, till you feel the truth of that declaration, The end of all things is at hand. Though an old declaration; though it has been reiterated for centuries, uttered in ears that have long since mouldered, still it comes fresh and startling to you this day. It will come again. The end will be upon you sooner than you think. You may see it even now, speeding on like the heated courser; weeks, months, years, come and go; deaths, coffins, graves, crowd on the vision; an infinite stake hanging by a hair; the inexorable scythe swinging darkly across your path—how can you be so unconcerned? How can you sleep on, in such circumstances of immense and awful interest, and astounding peril? If persisted in, you are lost. Ere you are aware, will come the unwaking sleep of the shroud and sepulchre, and the soul, neglected, undone, will be driven down to the un-sleeping tortures—the agonized, earthquake heavings of the second death. Fall not upon this doom, so dreadful; but turn at once and avoid it, and seek that other destiny, listening to mercy's call, and your soul shall live in heaven for ever.

SHORT SERMONS.

DANGER OF MAKING A PROFESSION OF RELIGION WITHOUT PIETY.

I never knew you.—MATTHEW 7: 23.

A PURE church is not to be expected on earth. Even in the time of the Apostles, when those who received the keys of the kingdom of heaven from Christ himself, were ministers, persons obtained access to the communion table, and were admitted to sealing ordinances, who had not the love of God. We have reason to believe there will be always tares among the wheat; foolish will be found mingled with wise virgins; the vile will be gathered with the precious in the gospel net. *Many*, we are told, in the last day, will say, *Lord, Lord, open to us*, who will be met with this appalling answer, "*I never knew you.*" From the description given of them, it is evident, professors of religion are intended.

My position is, that very few of those who are received among the visible followers of Christ without grace are ever brought to a knowledge of the truth. We read of hypocrites and false professors in scripture, but *never* of their conversion. I cannot conceive of a more perilous situation than that of one who has made a profession of religion unsupported by a good hope through grace, of one who, instead of making God his hope, makes hope his God. There is among all classes of thinking and conscientious persons, a well grounded apprehension of entering the Church without sufficient evidence of a spiritual, saving change.

I will point out some of the grounds of fear, that such persons will die in their sins. There is obviously a difference in point of danger, between those who are persuaded prematurely to assume so great a responsibility, through the injudicious solicitude of friends, and those who presumptuously or insincerely take the vows of God upon them. In both cases, however, the hazard is great.

1. There is a fancied security attending an enrolment of our names in the visible Church, which is greatly to be lamented and exceedingly dangerous. The pastor and Church have signified their approbation; and their acceptance has put to rest any previous fears, and for a time at least, quieted, if not removed, anxi-

ety and doubt. How is the vain confidence and false peace of such professors to be shaken? Is vice attacked? The force of education, or the apathy of natural constitution, or respect for character, keeps them from vicious habits. Is hypocrisy exposed and denounced? They are not aware of an intention to deceive; or of any guilt contracted by the heartless performance of duty. Any attempt on the part of the preacher to fasten conviction on the conscience, to break up false hopes, or to produce deep and godly sorrow, proves abortive; the heart is protected by a shield which no weapon can penetrate, wrapt in a covering which no hand can remove. The Spirit of God which alone gives efficacy to any means, operates through the medium of truth; but by them the force of truth is evaded, and its direct application turned aside. The longer, therefore, self-delusion is practised, and the appeals and searching messages of the Gospel are resisted, the greater the danger that the Spirit will be grieved, and the individuals given up to obduracy and blindness.

2. Another source of fear, that those who are in the visible Church will never truly turn to God, is found in the alarming truth, that the perversion of serious and solemn things has a tendency to produce peculiar hardness of heart and searedness of conscience.

A professor of religion, to be at all consistent, to hold a respectable standing among his fellow Christians, must daily engage in the performance of many holy duties. He must use the language of prayer. He must worship where Gabriel bows. He must meet the eye of God. He must speak unto the great King. He must read his word; attend upon the sacraments, and become conversant with scenes of awful interest. All this will exert an ameliorating influence upon a sanctified heart, and produce the happiest impression upon a pious mind. But no such results will follow where all is carnal and dead. The spirituality and the interest of the duties serve only to increase the insensibility of the conscience, and the sacredness of the subjects discussed and listened to, destroys the excitability of moral feeling. By becoming familiar with awful truths and hypocritically going through with solemn duties, the tenderness and purity of the soul are sullied and lost; religion is reduced to a cold and spiritless set of forms and observances.

3. Nor is this all. God is particularly offended with insincerity in the performance of religious duties. He "abhors the sacrifice where not the heart is found." There are frequent and unequivocal indications in the Bible of his displeasure against hollowness in Christian profession. The religion of the Gospel is a spiritual religion. *God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.* He requireth truth in the inward parts. Where sincere and supreme love doth not reign, he will not accept

the offering. His eye penetrates every fold of insincerity that covers, every unreal appendage that sets off, the performance of duty. How great the hazard then of provoking him to say, as in the case of his ancient people, *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? The new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with: it is iniquity, even in the solemn meeting: and when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers I will not hear.*

I will only add, in the conclusion, if there are any in the visible Church, in greater danger than others, they are those who are so little acquainted and impressed with the deceitfulness of the heart, and are so little alarmed at the idea of deception, as not to feel deep solicitude, and to institute the most faithful self-examination, and to endeavor, if possible, to gain some new evidence of a vital union to the Lord Jesus Christ.

HOW TO PRAY FOR A REVIVAL.

O Lord, revive thy work.—HABAKKUK 3:2.

The duty of Christians to pray for a revival of religion is plain, and enforced by the most affecting considerations. The inquiry arises, how should Christians thus pray.

1. Christians should offer prayer for a revival, feeling their entire dependence on the Lord for such an event. They should be deeply impressed with the truth that revivals are commenced and carried forward by the life-giving and constraining influences of the Holy Spirit. However essential in its proper place is human instrumentality, Christians must deeply *feel* that such instrumentality, or any other, is utterly insufficient *of itself* to produce or promote a revival of true religion. Such a work is to be accomplished, "Not by might" (or armies and human strength), "nor by power" (i. e., human), "but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." Every Christian, in praying for a revival, should be deeply imbued with the spirit of the Psalmist, when he gave the following directions to himself: "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him."

2. They should feel that there is *great need* of a revival—of the blessing for which they pray. If they do not feel thus, they will not be very earnest in prayer. A sense of need is what makes a beggar importunate. It is when Christians, in looking over the

community, see iniquity abound, God dishonored, religion languishing, and sinners perishing in their sins, that they feel the necessity of a revival, and will be likely to plead earnestly with God for it. This is what led the Psalmist to pray, "Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee?" This is what pressed upon the mind of the prophet Habakkuk, when he offered that oft-repeated and appropriate prayer, "O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known, in wrath remember mercy."

3. Prayer for a revival should be offered *in faith*. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." "Whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing that ye receive it, ye shall have it." An expectation of receiving what we pray for, manifests confidence in God, leads to perseverance, and is the ordained condition to which an answer is promised. Faith in the promise of Christ is what led the primitive disciples to persevere in their protracted prayer-meeting for ten days, before the Pentecost. If our divine Savior has assured us that our heavenly Father is more ready to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him, than earthly parents are to give good gifts to their children, have not Christians solid ground on which to rest their faith, when praying for this same Spirit, who is the Author of all true revivals, that he may be sent to revive us again? When we know that a revival greatly promotes the glory of God, and of course is in accordance with his will; and when we remember his promises to answer prayer, there seems no excuse for not offering the prayer of faith for a revival.

4. Christians should pray for a revival with *deep humility*. A sense of unworthiness as sinners, and as Christians, should lead them to lie low in the dust before the throne of grace, when asking for a visitation of the Holy Spirit. "I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof," was the language of one who had great faith, and whose prayer was answered. The lower they sink in their own estimation, the higher will their prayers ascend for the Lord's blessings.

5. Prayer for a revival should be offered with a *willingness to co-operate with God* in promoting it. While Christians should feel the Holy Spirit is the only efficient agent in revivals, they should be willing and ready to labor as zealously and perseveringly in their advancement as though revivals were their own work, and they were to succeed just in proportion to their skill and energy in promoting them. If Christians would offer acceptable prayer for a revival, they must do what they can to promote it. And unless they are willing to *do* as well as pray, they may as well stop praying.

6. Christians should pray for a revival with *importunity*. Let them remember the parable of the widow and the unjust judge,

where importunity overcame injustice and indifference. And shall not God avenge his own elect, who cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you he will avenge them speedily." Let them remember the parable of the man who went to borrow bread at midnight, where *importunity* obtained what even friendship could not. Let them mark the success which attended the faith, the humility, perseverance, and importunity of the Syro-Phenician woman. Let them contemplate the prayers of Jacob, Moses, Elijah, and Daniel, where perseverance and importunity had power with God, and prevailed. Let them remember the promises which God has made to answer prayer: "Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find," &c. "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, I will do it." "And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask *anything* according to his will, he heareth us; and if we know that he hear us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." "Before they call I will answer; and while they are speaking I will hear." With such promises as these before us, can we doubt the readiness of God to hear and answer prayer for a revival of religion? Let Christians get near the throne of grace, and wrestle with their heavenly Father, till he pour us out a blessing so great that there shall not be room to contain it.